DEA CLEARS FARC

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Tells the Facts and Names the Names

CounterPunch

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Edward Said as Jew

So if Edward Said isn't Palestinian, then what is he? Fact is, he's Jewish. It doesn't take much to figure it out, and Justus Reid Weiner has helped us to the truth. Weiner's the man who has a piece in the September issue of Commentary saying that Said is a faker, a liar, a misrepresenter, who's embezzled a Palestinian identity, whereas in truth Said is a rootless type, with parents of obscure patrial origin, popping up here and there in the Levant, bowered always in luxurious circumstance. In other words, our old friend the rootless cosmopolitan Jew, as set forth in a million anti-Semitic tracts.

As assiduous as any anti-Semite in the Dreyfus era, Weiner and his assistants spent hour after hour in the archives burrowing through the nooks and crannies of Said's family history. Turns out Edward's father didn't own the house in Jerusalem. It was owned by... well, never mind who Weiner thinks owned it because he gets it all wrong, but even so it's got that fragrance of insider-family dealing which anti-Semites used to get frenzied about. The house was owned by Edward's father's sister — his aunt, that is, and her husband who was Said's father's first cousin. Thrill upon thrill delight Weiner and his crew. Here are baptismal certificates with addresses left blank, records that are unsatisfactory, property never decently advertised in the correct names desired. Now weren't those rootless, exiled, ever-nervous Jews of the Diaspora just the same way, with their endless inter-familial dealings, and property held by cousin so-and-so, who was in partnership with his wife's uncle, and had that other cousin as business partner in Cairo.

It had to happen to Said, that the leading Palestinian intellectual in the world would be accused of being Jewish, by Jews at that. But, as we told him the other day, there's a silver lining to the torrent of filth being poured on his head by the New York Post, Sid Zion, Paul Johnson's son Daniel, John Podhoretz and others. Weiner was staked for his three-years trek through Said's family history by an outfit called the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, whose principle financial paymaster listed in the last filing on the Center's website is the Milken family foundation of Los Angeles, founded in 1982 by two brothers, Lowell and Michael Milken. On the Milken family foundation website we find a mission statement by the Milken family, declaring that they are commited to the promotion of inventive and effective ways of helping people help themselves, said projects being primarily advanced through work in education and medical research. Then the Milkens pledge that they will strengthen education by recognizing and rewarding "outstanding educators". "This is your chance", we told Said. "You're surely an outstanding educator. So apply to the Milkens for a grant. And since they've already paid Weiner to credential you as an honorary Jew, you've got a good chance."

Here's how it stacks up. The Milken family fund is flush with cash partly amassed by Michael Milken, tagged in the Eighties as the emblematic crook Jewish financier, finally going down for fraud and doing time in the federal pen. Some of the moolah finds its way to the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (address, Beit Milken, 13 Tel Hai street) and is duly dispensed to our "scholar in residence", Justus Reid Weiner. Now, Justus ain't no scholar, any more than members of the Podhoretz clan whose intricate inter-familial partnerships and associations can be laboriously traced through the pages of Commentary, the New York Post and kin

(**Said,** *continued on page 7*)

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Our Little Secrets

Fat Man Earrings

As the Chinese know, much to their dismay, Department of Energy sites have become an odd new tourist destination. More people visit Los Alamos each year than Fort Ticonderoga, site of another famous spy scandal. At Oak Ridge, visitors are led on a self-guided nature tour of an irradiated forest. At the Idaho National Engineering Labs, the curious are shown a prototype of one of Edward Teller's more bizarre fantasies, the nuclear powered jet engine. According to the Department of Energy's Public Affairs office many of the foreign visitors to these sites are Japanese.

Where there are tourists, there are also gift shops. Among the trinkets to be found at the Energy Department's Sandia Labs gift shop on Kirtland Air Force Base, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, are medallions commemorating the flight units which nuked Japan. The gift shop also sells matching pairs of earrings shaped like Little Boy and Fat Man, the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki . The earrings sell for $20 and, according to gift shop manager, Tony Sparks, are the most popular item in the store.

Naomi Kishimoto, who heads the Japanese anti-nuke group Gensuikyo (Council Against A and H Bombs) and who learned of the bomb replicas from outraged Japanese tourists, told us that she found the earrings and other nuclear momentos appalling. "We're very angry", Kishimoto said. "It's not the sort of thing that should be hanging from your ears or using to decorate your desk. How can that museum sell something that praises the unit that dropped the atom bomb?'

The museum's director James Walther sees no problem with the bomb earrings and says he has no plans to stop selling them. "This museum doesn't advocate war", Walther says. But the museum director did note that he believed the earrings commemorated a turning point in history and that the museum, along with its gift shop, promotes the idea that the bombings,which killed at least 210,000 Japanese civilians, "ended the war and saved the lives of US soldiers".

This rationalization perpetuates one of the great frauds of the war in the Pacific. As described in John Dower's excellent War Without Mercy, by the spring of 1945 the Japanese military had been demolished. The disparities in the casualties figures between the Japanese and the Americans are striking. From 1937 to 1945, the Japanese Imperial Army and Navy suffered 1,740,955 military deaths in combat. Dower estimates that another 300,000 died from disease and starvation. In addition, another 395,000 Japanese civilians died as a result of Allied saturation bombing that began in March 1945. The total dead: more than 2.7 million. By contrast, American military deaths totaled 100,997.

The commemoration of the Air Force wing which conducted the bombing of Japan is particularly galling. Beyond the atom bombs, such a memorial sanctifies the barbaric actions of Gen. Henry "Hap" Arnold, who pressed Harry Truman to put on "as big a finale as possible". Even though Japan had announced its intentions to surrender on August 10, this didn't deter the bloodthirsty Arnold. On August 14, Arnold directed a 1,014 plane air raid on Tokyo, blasting the city to ruins and killing thousands. Not one American plane was lost and the unconditional surrender was signed before the planes had returned to their bases.

Those atom bombs were aimed at Moscow as much as they were Japan.

Gottlieb's Tracks?

In 1972, a few months before he would take office as Prime Minister of New Zealand, Labor Party leader Norman Kirk visited Europe and returned feeling sick. Kirk never fully recovered and died two years later, on August 31, 1974. His death was ruled a heart attack, but there was speculation at the time that he had been poisoned, perhaps by the Central Intellligence Agency.

Kirk had repeatedly denounced US military adventures in the Pacific and its war against Vietnam. The US wanted to use the New Zealand bases to dock its submarines if there was a nuclear war in the northern hemisphere. Prime Minister Kirk rebuffed these requests.

At the end of last month, on the 25th anniversary of Kirk's death, Bob Harvey, current president of the New Zealand Labour Party, sent a letter to Bill Clinton requesting the CIA's files on Kirk. Harvey has also pressed New Zealand's Prime Minister, Jenny Shipley, to raise the issue with Clinton when he visits New Zealand in October. Harvey charges that the CIA instigated the overthrow of Australian Prime minister Gough Whitlam and that Kirk "may have paid the supreme price". Indeed the role of the CIA in Whitlam's ouster is no longer contested and; as CounterPunch readers know well, the CIA's technical services division, under the leadership of the late Sidney Gottlieb, had plenty of toxins on hand to lay low inconveniences to Empire such as the courageous Kirk.

DEA Clears FARC

While doubts prevail on the precise time lapse since George W. Bush's intimate contacts with cocaine, there is similar uncertainty on US policy toward the country from which George W's powder probably came: Colombia. (What is it with the Bush family and cocaine? It was George W's dad, George Herbert Walker Bush, who oversaw CIA complicity in shipments of cocaine from Colombia via Central America to El Norte.)The past couple of months have seen an increasingly acrimonious debate in Washington as to whether Colombia should be our next

Editors
Alexander Cockburn
Jeffrey St. Clair

Design
Deborah Thomas

Counselor
Ben Sonnenberg

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Washington, DC, 20007-2829
1-800-840-3683 (phone)
1-800-967-3620 (fax)
www.counterpunch.org

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Vietnam. On August 6, that puissant lawmaker, Rep Dan Burton of Indiana, said he had visions of Americans some day fleeing via helicopter from the roof of the US embassy in Bogota, just as they did from Saigon. Mark Souder, another rep from Indiana, promptly chimed in that Colombia was in some ways more of a threat to America than Vietnam because drugs that originate in Colombia threaten the lives of countless Americans.

There's a big lobby in Washington for rushing billions south to battle Colombia's guerilla armies, most notably the FARC, to which President Andres Pastrana effectively ceded control of a large chunk of south-central Colombia last winter. Both Jesse Helms and Ben Gilman, heads of the foreign relations committees on the Hill, urge dispatch of cash, military supplies and so does the White House, in the form of General Barry McCaffrey, drug "czar". McCaffrey sees no line between fighting a drug war counter-insurgency. He's said that the guerilla groups are narco-traffickers who threaten the Colombian state and also US security. He's been pushing for the immediate dispatch of a further $2 billion to the Andean zone, on top of the $500 million being sought by the Colombian military. The US is already sending $289 million in anti-narcotics aid to Colombia this year.

Such figures understate the level of US assistance. Aside from an unknown number of CIA and DEA agents, there are — officially, as of August 10 — 283 Defense Department advisors in Colombia, some of them staffing radar stations and spy planes like the De Havilland RC-7 that crashed into a mountain last month, killing its American crew. The advisors send info to Colombia military and police who use it or pass it along to the death squads undser their control. It's the same operating procedure as was set up in El Salvador in the 1980s, when the Defense Department used to claim it never had more than 55 military advisors deployed at any one time. In 1996 the DoD finally admitted that the real number had been far, far higher.

But as McCaffrey — formerly head of US Southern Command, don't forget — bellows about the "narco-guerillas" we find a surprising demur, from the DEA. Testifying not long ago before the House subcommittee on crime and drugs, the DEA's chief administrator, Donnie Marshall, testified that the DEA does not believe that the Colombian guerillas are narcotics organizations: "The DEA has not arrived at the conclusion that the FARC are drug traffickers," Marshall said, adding that he had no doubt that the FARC and ELN (another guerilla group) "are associated with drug traffickers, providing protection or extorting money from them. But from the point of view of the DEA, we judge the FARC from the point of view of enforcing the law. And at the moment we haven't come close to the conclusion that this group has been involved as a drug trafficking organization." So with this unexpected endorsement of the FARC's revolutionary integrity, the policy debate rages on. President Pastrana supports the DEA position, saying there is no evidence that it's iunvolved in the drug trade beyond charging a toll on drug operations in the areas under its control. "The FARC has always said they are interested in eradicating illegal crops."

Can you imagine CNN (or the New York Times for that matter) devoting stories to Alabama's decision to excise Marx or Freud from the high school curriculum?

WHAT ABOUT FREUD, MARX, FOUCAULT?

Why all the media's uproar over the decision of Kansas to elide the observations of Charles Darwin from the classroom? A CounterPunch co-editor has spent many hours in the middle and high school classrooms of Oregon, that Enlightened State, tracking the studies of his two teenagers. Darwin has yet to make even the slightest appearance. The biology classes scrupulously avoid the meta-topic of evolution. Kansas has simply made de jure what is de facto across much of the nation.

But so what? Other great thinkers, Freud, Hegel, Marx, Havelock Ellis and Foucault, have also been amputated from any textbook and their works are not even to be found in the high school library— this is in the Portland metro area, not faraway Baker City. (Not to mention, closer to home, Edward Abbey or Vine Deloria, who have more to say about the real history of the West than anything in the history texts.)

Can you imagine CNN (or the NYT, for that matter) devoting stories to, say, Alabama's decision to excise Marx from the high school curriculum? Nope. But we can easily envision widespread outrage on those same editorial pages at a decision by, say, the Ann Arbor school district to make the 18th Brumaire and Totem and Taboo required reading.

WACO: YOU READ IT HERE FIRST

Back on June 1 CounterPunch reported the following: Delta Force commanders were on the scene during the final seige of the Koresh compound in Waco; that FBI tapes showed the agency had shot incendiary grenades at a bunker hours before the final conflagration; that Vince Foster was assigned the task of investigating the Waco disaster for the White House and that Foster's wife believed he was depressed by what he had discovered; that Foster's notes disappeared from his office shortly after his suicide and later turned up with Hillary Clinton's billling records in the Whitewater deal in the private quarters of the White House. On August 25, the FBI began a series of damaging admissions confirming our story, and the multi-year long research of investigator and filmmaker Mike McNulty.

The Pentagon, however, claims that the Delta Force commanders who were on the scene, Gen. Peter Schoomaker and Col. Gerald Boykin, were there only as "onlookers" and denies that the military had any involvement in the final assault. However, this contention is undercut by the FBI's own admission that the incendiary devices were "military" grenades. These grenades, it seems, came from the Delta Force, as did other assault weapons, including helicopters and tanks.

On September 1, Janet Reno announced her intentions to appoint a "independent investigator." The name at the top of her list is the self-righteous Republican from New Hampshire, Warren Rudman, the man who, along with Lee Hamilton, helped sweep Iran/Contra under the rug. ■

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Our Biggest Temperate Rainforest: The Chainsaws Never Stop

I saw an element of good faith that I haven't seen before." When Senator Ted Stevens says that about Bill Clinton and Al Gore, you just know something bad is in the works. It is. The Alaska congressional delegation has just signed a pact with the Clinton administration to once again boost logging levels on the nation's biggest swath of temperate rainforest: the Tongass National Forest in southeast Alaska.

Under the terms of an agreement reached between Stevens and White House chief of staff John Podesta , the administration has agreed to supply a three-year supply of cheap timber to a veneer mill owned by Gateway Forest Products, a new company started by executives from timber giant Louisiana Pacific. The deal assures Gateway of getting 400 million board feet of timber over the next three years.

This is a much higher rate of logging than biologists on the forest say the Tongass can withstand. Two years ago federal biologist said that several species on the Tongass, including the Queen Charlotte's goshawk, Alexander Archipelago wolf, and marbled murrelets, were in trouble because of rampant logging and road building. Southeast Alaska's salmon runs, once thought inexhaustible, were also considered vulnerable. These biologist recommended that logging be kept to no more than 75 million board feet a year, roughly half what will be permitted under the Stevens/Podesta deal. Most recently, a report by the Pacific Northwest Research Station, a branch of the Forest Service, said that logging on the Tongass' fragile karst soils (karst is a limestone formation typified by sinkholes, underground rivers and caves) has seriously damaged soil depth and fertility.

"Each time we've had meetings like this that we thought would mean peace in the valley, as we call it, other elements have disrupted that peace," Stevens told the Anchorage Daily News.

There doesn't seem to be much danger of environmentalists rocking the boat. The Tongass, once the darling of the national environmental groups who spent millions back in the 1980s touting its irreplaceable virtues, has been nearly forgotten in Clinton time. Yet, it remains the last workhorse of big timber. Oh, yes, there was a flurry of attention a few years ago when the administration canceled the long term contracts of the two pulp mills in Sitka and Ketchikan. But that was after the market for pulp had plunged and the mills shut down.

The big money on the Tongass is in the high-end old-growth meant for veneer mills and sawmills, particularly cedar. Of course, the big trees of the Tongass were always the attraction to the dominant players in Alaska, namely Ketchikan Pulp Company, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Louisiana-Pacific. The pulp mill never made much money, even with a $40 million a year subsidy from the federal treasury. But the contracts also guaranteed LP exclusive rights to Tongass timber at ridiculously low prices, including highly valued Alaskan cedar. Japanese timber merchants, who prize cedar for use in building tea-houses and other ceremonial buildings, are willing to pay upwards of $1,500 per thousand board feet. LP often pays the Forest Service less than $2 per thousand for the same trees.

The sorry economics of Tongass timber sales haven't changed under the Clinton administration. A recent report by the General Accounting Office says that from the end of 1992 through 1994, the Tongass National Forest lost more than $102 million on its timber sale program. The loss was more than $3,270 per acre cut, an astounding figure. For the next three years, the pace of the logging decreased (mainly because of depressed pulp prices) but the losses mounted. From 1995 to 1998, the Tongass lost nearly $70 million, or $5,010 per acre.

This timber is not providing many jobs in Alaska. That's because since 1993 more than 80 percent of the timber cut from the Tongass has been shipped as raw logs to Japan, Korea and China. But the price to sustain the few jobs generated by is enormous. In 1997, the federal taxpayer put up $28,673 for each job produced by Tongass logging. Of course, this is far less than those loggers and millworkers actually made. The difference ends up in the corporate coffers of Louisiana Pacific. Since 1983, the total subsidy to LP and the other beneficiaries of Tongass timber amounts to more than $800 million.

Even with these subsidies LP was having a hard time in Alaska and planned to shut down its operations there entirely by next year, leaving more than 100 million board feet of timber (about 5,000 acres) currently under contract uncut. That's when Stevens, the head of the Senate Appropriations committee, went to work.. More than $40 million was shoveled to local communities as "relief" money and LP executives were induced with lavish federal and local pay-outs to form a new company (ie., Gateway) to continue LP's operations. More than $10 million of the relief funds went to Gateway, not the laid off workers it was supposedly earmarked for. The next problem was securing enough timber to keep the veneer mill in operation. That's where Podesta came to the rescue.

The most recent deal has been in the works for months. It was quietly sealed on the same day Al Gore climbed Mount Rainier with his son, Albert the Third. The timing, no doubt, is so that Gore's fingerprints wouldn't be traceable. Not that it matters much. It's hard to see the enviro crowd in Washington or Anchorage holding Gore accountable, anyway.

And, in fact, there's been barely a peep of protest from the lavishly-funded Alaska Rainforest Coalition since the deal came down. No full page ads in the New York Times. No calls for Gore to denounce the deal. There's some cautious discussion of a lawsuit. But even that is narrowly drawn and, if filed, would only affect about a third of the land slated for clearcutting.

There's plenty of backroom talk about what Stevens gave away for this gift. It doesn't add up to much. Apparently, he promised not push through any more legislative riders exempting Tongass timber sale planners from environmental laws this year. He also apparently pledged not to move to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling in the next Congress. Again this is hardly much of a concession in an era of low oil prices. Plus, Arco, BP and Chevron will be busy for the next decade drilling the hell out of the equally fragile Alaska Petroleum Reserve just west of Prudhoe Bay. ■

"Everybody gets something off the back of the Tongass", says Alaskan Alan Stein.

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"Labor Stumbles":

CounterPunch Article Stirs the Pot

Back at the start of summer we offered what we called a short history of why a militant labor movement won't come out of Washington HQ [see "Labor Stumbles", June 16-30]. It cited a few lowlights in AFL-CIO Central's organizing initiatives, media maneuvering and self-absorption—the last of those also known by some activists as "creeping bureaucratic arrogance".

Our story provoked energetic responses within labor circles, including the AFL-CIO Corporate Affairs Department, whence Josh Mason unburdened himself of the opinion that what labor needs is more bureaucracy, not less. Mason then delivered the astounding disclosure that: "personally, I'm convinced the search for grassroots authenticity is a dead end, at least for labor".

We won't belabor the rest of Mason's bizarre communique . After all, what can you say about a person on staff who repeatedly refers to "Hot Rock"—a curious mangling of HOTROC, the raggedy hotel and restaurant organizing project in New Orleans—when he's writing about the building trades organizing project in Las Vegas, actually known as BTOP? But take a moment to consider his conclusion quoted above.

Coming from a man within AFL hq (even if he is low-level) this statement has startled activists in the field. If "grassroots authenticity" is "a dead end", they're asking, then how do you explain:

• the 1989-90 mineworkers' struggle at Pittston, which relied on the extraordinary grit of the rank and file, their efforts at building solidarity with other unionists and with local people in the mining towns (including schoolchildren, who went on sympathy walkouts), and their discipline, despite serious privation.

• the recent victory of 5,000 textile workers at Fieldcrest Cannon in Kannapolis, North Carolina, after a twenty-five-year campaign for a union, a campaign that could not have succeeded without a tenacious core of workers within the plant who would not let the organizers (from what eventually became UNITE) walk away from the fight.

• the effort, under way as we go to press, of Overnite workers across the country preparing to strike after going five years without a first contract — five years during which workers who'd voted to join the Teamsters have had to stay together despite the absence of union benefits guaranteed by contract, and despite the firing of hundreds of union activists and leaders, and the commission of more than a thousand unfair labor practices as charged by the NLRB.

All of those struggles, of course, also depended on serious — sometimes, as in the case of the United Mine Workers, heroic — commitments from the top. But the UMW would not have wagered its treasury; UNITE (and its previous incarnations) would not have spent years of time and millions of dollars in legal challenges; and the Teamsters (especially under its current retrograde chieftains) would not now be welcoming support troops from Jobs With Justice and labor activists nationwide if all of them did not have the pressure and the commitment of the ranks below. In fact, there's not a union in the country that can mount a successful battle without the wholehearted efforts of the workers—the very thing that gives a union authenticity. That truth is inscribed in the AFL/United Farm Workers' failure in the strawberry fields, the defeat that prompted our initial article.

From AFL HQ, now this: "the search for grassroots authenticity is a dead end, at least for labor."

A word on "bureaucracy". There's a difference between bureaucracy and leadership. The first pretends to speak for workers while in fact nourishing contemptuous opinions about the irrelevancy of the grassroots; the second listens to and represents workers, and recognizes that without the grassroots all its brilliant plans and well-paid lawyers are as nothing. The matter is simple: if you believe "grassroots authenticity" is a dead end, you're saying that ordinary workers aren't capable of struggle; and if they aren't capable of struggle, there can't be a labor movement, only labor institutions. This isn't romantic faith in the spontaneous generation of rank-and-file power: it's called an understanding of the dialectics of everyday struggle and movement building, something that's often missing at 16th Street in Washington (and in the top ranks of international unions) by people who ought never to forget that they survive off the dues paid by workers. ■

"They Were the Wrong Kind of Dissidents"

The September 20 issue of The Nation carries another bit of cheerleading for the AFL from Paul Buhle and Steve Fraser, both historians and now seemingly doubling up as hot-air dispensers for the federation's pr department.The one dark cloud they detect on the labor horizon is the Teamsters' recent ugly repression of immigrant meatworkers in Washington state and the placing of their local under trusteeship, a move they see as indicative of the Teamsters return to "bossism". There's no defending Teamster thuggishness , but trusteeship is always bossism. Back in 1995, John Sweeney, then president of the Service Employees International Union, put another local of largely immigrant and minority workers under trusteeship in Los Angeles. The dissidents in the local, workers who had not long before been the darlings of the union's Justice for Janitors campaign, had committed the crime of ousting most of the local leadership. It was a typically messy matter. The man Sweeney sent to oversee that trusteeship was Bill Fletcher, onetime union dissident himself and now a special assistant to Sweeney. Buhle and Fraser hail Fletcher at the end of their Nation piece as the Wobblies' heir. Fletcher is a very good man, but back in '95 when he was sent to put down those immigrant workers, he justified Sweeney's summary exercise of might by saying, "They were the wrong kind of dissidents". Union politics may be exciting, sometimes inspiring, but they are almost never neat and pretty.

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Commentary "Scholar" Deliberately Faked the Record in His Attack on Edward Said

A former schoolmate of Edward Said has told CounterPunch that Justus Reed Weiner, author of an attack on the renowned Palestinian intllectual in the September issue of Commentary, deliberately suppressed pertinent information. In Commentary Weiner attempts to show that Said misrepresented facts about his childhood. (See accompanying article in this issue.) Among Weiner's insinuations is the charge that there is no evidence to confirm that Said ever attended St George's, a famous school in east Jerusalem, which Said revisits in a widely viewed documentary.

Weiner writes that there is no trace of Said in the school registry and he cites a former Jewish student at St George's, David Ezra, as saying he has no memory of Said, even though Said has spoken of his youthful acquaintance with Ezra at the school.

But even as he was doing his utmost to give Commentary readers the impression that Said had bizarrely misrepresented the circumstances and friendships of his early life, Weiner had on his desk notes of a conversation with a former St George's student who told him explicitly that Said had been at that school with him.

Haig Boyadjian, an Armenian, is a retired banker now living in Marwah, New Jersey. The 64-year old Boyadjian tells us that in the spring of this year Weiner called him from Jerusalem, saying that he was doing an article on St George's, and had been given Boyadjian's name by another St George's alumnus. In the course of a conversation lasting around an hour Weiner asked if Boyadjian could recall former schoolmates. Eventually Said's name came up, and Boyadjian told Weiner that yes, Said had been a fellow student but that because St George's was closed for two years after 1948, Said had graduated from Victoria school in Cairo.

Boyadjian emphasizes to CounterPunch that he most explicitly told Weiner that Said had been a fellow student, and that he finds it "unbelievable" that Weiner should have suppressed their conversation in his Commentary article.

In his Commentary article Weiner tries to leave himself some wiggle room. After announcing that no records show Said to have attended the school and after reporting David Ezra's reaction, Weiner carefully tosses in this sentence: "None of this... is to gainsay the possibility" of Said having been "a temporary student" at St Georges, a sentence that has the furtive briskness of a thief trying to wipe his fingerprints off a window pane.

Although he boasts that he talked to over 80 people during his probe into Said's childhood, Weiner names almost none of them, perhaps understandably. Not only is Boyadjian fuming at his deceptions, but Andre Sharon, an Egyptian Jew whom Weiner had interviewed, has written a devastating rebuke to Weiner, with a rephrasing of this same rebuke to the editor of the New York Times. Sharon's admonitions are worth quoting almost in full.

A Devastating Rebuke

Dear Mr. Weiner, I have to say I was surprised and disappointed by the article in today's Times regarding your investigative probe into the details of Said's childhood years. With respect, you've missed several points:

1. There were no meaningful frontiers when we were growing up, particularly mental ones. As I point out in my correspondence, this was a positive legacy of the Ottoman Empire. An Egyptian Jew, my ancestors came from Syria. My grandfather arrived in Egypt from Iraq by caravan. Some moved on to the Sudan, but it could as well have been Palestine or Lebanon. Certainly at Victoria College the student body included many from every country in the Arab world, the Mediterranean Basin and beyond. As you are aware, the period was one of great political regional change. Although some were a lot more interested than others, all of us were fairly highly politicized and sensitized from a very early age.

The point is that the upheavals were regional, not merely national. Those Arabs who came to Egypt from other parts of the area felt an affinity with an Arab culture that easily transcended nationalist ones. It mattered much less to the inhabitants that they were from Syria, and Iraq, and Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia and Oman than it did to the Foreign Office at the Quai d'Orsay.

In short, that Said moved seamlessly from Palestine to Egypt to Lebanon is remarkable only for being so unremarkable to him and to those he grew up with. He was a Palestinian Arab,

"Such a fuss over a house! Again, with respect, you've missed the point."

like I was an Egyptian Jew.

2. Such a fuss over a house! Again, with respect, you've missed the point. We're talking about extremely warm and closely-knit Middle Eastern communities. We lived in each other's homes, all the time. I sometimes spent weeks at a time at my grandfather's and grandmother's apartments. I, too, made a pilgrimage to visit them during my first return trip to Egypt.) Friends and relatives drifted in and out of each others homes all the time. Extended families were the norm. Again, that Said should have spent periods with different family members in different phases of his life in different houses in different countries at different times was wholly unremarkable. It's a cultural phenomenon that is quite common in all social and economic strata in the Middle East.

3. As you can see from my letter to my Egyptian school boy friend, my own worldview has changed in many ways over the years. I have strong philosophical disagreements with Said on many issues. However, I concur with his reported comment in today's NY Times that the issues you have raised about his childhood are irrelevant. And only partly because of the explanations I have sketched about much more important:

1. The key issue is that Arabs were ejected from Palestine (as indeed were Jews from the Arab world). It's a good thing that this fundamental reality is being confronted.

2. Now let's move on for their descendants' sake.

Yours sincerely,
Andre Sharon

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(**Said,** *continued from page 1*)

dred settlements. Like them, Justus is a propagandist, whose previous job was to serve as a paid flack for Israel's Department of Justice, where he'd be rushed forward to defend Israel's security forces any time Human Rights Watch or Amnesty or any other outfit leveled charges of, torture and kindred offenses. Weiner would say it was all lies put about by enemies of Israel, draw down his stipend and head for the beach. A financial scam artist stakes a flack to say that Palestine's top intellectual is Jewish. What a plot!

We remember hearing Edward Said, back in the fall of 1996, using a keynote speech at a conference in his honor at Columbia University to address two themes: the first came in the form of a reading from manuscript pages of the memoir, Out of Place, he was then in the process of composing and which is to be published shortly. The portion Said read to us that day concerned his teenage memories of the fall of Palestine. His second theme, stated with great passion, concerned his certainty that a just and lasting peace in the land of his birth could only be achieved by reconciliation between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Said left us in no doubt that he considered this—far more than the formal provisions of any diplomatic agreement — as the sine qua non of any tolerable future.

How bitterly ironic it is, therefore, that at that same moment Weiner, an American Jew transplanted to Israel, was embarking on a project designed to be the most cruelly contemptuous of ripostes to Said's speech; one that denies him even the core credential of a Palestinian today, a person as oppressed by the loss of nationhood as any Jew down the centuries, until creation of the state of Israel in 1948 restored that dignity to Jews everywhere, just as it imparted a sense of loss or exile to Palestinians .

Said's family, Weiner asserts, was really from Cairo, only occasionally visiting Jerusalem. Weiner has to concede that Said was born in Jerusalem in 1935 but exerts himself greatly to demonstrate that Said had virtually no other connection to that city.

In one passage Weiner proclaims that the Talbieh neighborhood, where the Said family house was, in Jerusalem was peaceful in the months before establishment of the state of Israel, and that therefore any notion of compelled flight, of exile of the Said family is wrong. Yes folks, we're back with that old chestnut of "voluntary"

A financial scam artist stakes a flack to say that Palestine's top intellectual is Jewish. What a plot!

Palestinian departure in 1948 which even the new editions of Israel' s school books say is nonsense.

In sum, Weiner's essential charge is that Edward Said has deceived his vast public utterly about his life, that he is a liar.

Aside from the fact that Said is nothing of the sort there's something eerie about all this, like looking at history through the wrong end of a telescope. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that Said was born in New York, had never set foot in Palestine before 1948 or Israel thereafter. Would that degrade his role as Palestinian spokesman? If so, are we to ridicule the bonds to Israel that American Jews cherish and often proclaim. Do they have no right to speak for Israel?

The more one looks at them, the more meanly trivial, as well as factitious, Weiner's charges turn out to be. Does it really matter that title to the Said house in Jerusalem was held by close kin? The young Said lived in it, and after 1948 the house was taken away from the Said family, decreed to be "absentee enemy property" by Israel. Weiner labors to say Said is not a "refugee"; but the fact is that Weiner, an American Jew, has the right to return to Israel and immediate citizenship but the Saids do not. Said's mother (vaguely described by Weiner as "of Lebanese origin") was a Palestinian refugee and after 1948 could neither return to her own country nor reclaim her family property. Said has never denied his relatively privileged background nor his family's sojourns in Cairo. What he has eloquently attested to is the Palestinian loss of national identity along with material exile.

Weiner's effort to show that Said somehow isn't Palestinian is as weirdly audacious as Golda Meir's notorious claim three decades ago that there was no such thing as the Palestinian people, only Arab transplants with no rights. Surely we're past that. The charge against Palestinians like Said used to be that they wouldn't recognize Israel's right to exist. Here we are in 1999, with Weiner frantically trying to deny Said's right to exist as Palestine's foremost intellectual spokesman, resident at a foundation, staked not only by the Milkens but by the Crown Family Foundation, Max Fisher, Max Kampelman and others.

What is it about Said that so enrages off the Commentary crowd, that prompts the Jerusalem Center to rent Weiner's services? Is it that he has become president of the Modern Languages Association, and thus is in a position of unparalleled opportunity to inflect the literary tastes of millions of Eng Lit and Comp Lit students, maybe even lobby for the resuscitation of the semi-colon, an all-too typical piece of Canaanite subversion of the colon beloved by the Judaeo-Christian lobby at the Chicago Stylebook? Do not think we jest. In the wake of Weiner's attack, the Zionist Organization of America called on the board of the MLA to dismiss Said as their president. Is it because Said has attacked the Oslo Agreement and Wye follow-up, assented to by that nice Mr Arafat? Or is it because he's cultivated, polylingual, a pianist even, the living paradigm of qualities anti-Semites resented about Jews a hundred years ago?

Said thinks that the basic agenda of Weiner and his backers comes down to the issues of dispossession, compensation and

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citizenship.

"Weiner is really suggesting that when it comes to the whole question of Palestinian dispossession, Israel is not really responsible. First because Palestinians exaggerate their claims, and second, becasue many Palestinians who claim to be Palestinians are lying. Here I am, a highly visible Palestinian intellectual denounced as a liar. To defame me is to cast doubt of the validity of our people's claim to prior residence in Palestine and also to cover up the incredible racist bias of the law of return, which entitles any Jew anywhere the right to immediate israeli citizenship just because they're Jews; whereas no Palestinian who was born in Palestine, no matter how long or short their residence, is allowed any such right at all. According to American law, if you are an alien born in the US you immediately acquire citizenship by the fact of that birth, not by the length of residence. Why shouldn't I be entitled to citizenship in the country of my birth by virtue of my birth there? Why? Because I am not Jewish."

As for the manic insistence on his whereabouts in his formative years, "I always felt myself to be an outsider except in Palestine, where literally all my extended family lived and from which that same extended family was entirely evicted in 1948. I had relatives in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Haifa, Jaffa, and Nablus. Those places played a formative role in the forging of my consiousness and personal history. This is something that Zionists who claim that the Palestinian presence was never 'a real one' cannot deal with. In most cases they can't even admit to themselves that Israel has tried to obliterate Palestinian national consciousness."

And what about the matter of whether he is or is not a refugee? "Through my aunt and through relatives I very soon sympathetically identified with the refugee state. Second, my mother was half Lebanese and had a Palestinian passport. As I said in many of my writings, my mother after 1948 had enormous problems traveling and or returning to Palestine. She was unable to obtain a US passport, or an Egyptian one, and was indeed a refugee from her own country, becasue she could neither return there nor reclaim her family property nor practically use her Palestinian passport which was effectively invalid. Were it not for my father's US citizenship — in the First World War he volunteered as a Doughboy under Pershing because he hated the Turks, and was gassed on the Western Front in France — and his resources she would have shared the fate of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, immobilised and destitute because of the destruction of their society."

Said could have told all these things to Weiner, if the "resident scholar" hadn't been too chicken to ask.

Now, Said could have told all these things to Weiner, if the "resident scholar" hadn't been too chicken to ask. Weiner has claimed that two and a half years ago, he called Said's office and left a message, "explaining what he had found and asking Mr Said to call". He claims to have got no response, and never tried again. This is what Weiner told the New York Times. We don't believe a word of it. For thirteen years Zaineb Istrabadi has been in charge of Said's office. She makes a list of all the calls and gives them to Said. Istrabadi tells us emphatically that no such call was ever received.

This affair doesn't have any legs. The wretched Weiner will have wasted his time, just as Joan Peters did, when she relapsed into discredited obscurity, after the Commentary crowd briefly siezed on her effort, in From Time Immemorial, to prove that Palestinians weren't Palestinians, had come from somewhere else and had no claim on Israel's real estate.

The "vision" of the Jerusalem Center promulgated in the Center's website, announces that "We are centered in Israel because we see Israel as the principal motivating force for contemporary Jews and the only place for Jews to encounter and participate in the development of a fully authentic Jewish civilization, from pop culture to spiritual expression, from cleaning the streets to Jewish self-government; in the words of Oliver Cromwell 'warts and all.'

Why doesn't the Center invite Edward Said to be a scholar in residence, to discuss warts with them and the question of whether any civilization that is premised on exclusion — in this case of Palestinians — could ever deserve the word "authentic". ■

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